

# Glad you're home, dad!

*Kristie Allen is a freshman at Lamar School. Her parents are Tommy and Linda Allen and she has a sister, Kayla. Kristie loves to sing, play the piano and perform.*

*"I chose this subject because Hannah Smith is a good friend of mine and I remember when her father left to go overseas, and how it changed her family's life," she said.*

**By Kristie Allen**  
special to The Star

It is hard for me to imagine life at home without my father. There would be no one to pick me up from school in an old, extremely noisy truck that always turns heads, no one to yell at the television every night to "buy a vowel, man!" and no one to turn on the coffee pot in the morning before anyone is awake, including the sun.

Life would be so different, I cannot begin to imagine what it would be like.

But, one of my good friends, Hannah Smith, does know what it is like to live for awhile without a father at home. Almost two years ago, Staff Sgt. Barry Smith was deployed to Iraq. He is a security forces specialist in the Mississippi Air National Guard's 186th Air Refueling Wing.

Smith left his wife, Lynelle, and three children, Hannah, 15, Tyler, 7, and Emily, 6, to go overseas for four months.

I interviewed Hannah to get an insight about how she coped with her father's absence. I also wanted to find out how her family dealt with the separation.

**Kristie:** What was the biggest change for your family?



PHOTO BY PAULA MERRITT / THE MERIDIAN STAR

## SEPARATION

Kristie Allen interviews her friend, Hannah Smith, about how her family coped while Hannah's father, Staff Sgt. Barry Smith of the Mississippi Air National Guard's 186th Air Refueling Wing, served in Iraq. Hannah's advice: "Keep faith, pray and hang in there."

**Hannah:** There were still bills to pay. There was one less check coming in for our family. This meant more responsibility for everyone. Another issue was worry. This was more difficult to deal with than the responsibility part.

**Kristie:** What was the hardest part of the experience?

**Hannah:** Watching the news was definitely the hardest part. We never really knew exactly where my father was, and it was very scary to watch the news and to see all that was happening overseas.

**Kristie:** How did this affect

your little brother and sister?

**Hannah:** They were really a little too young to understand what was going on. It didn't affect them as much as it did me, being 14 at the time and knowing what was going on in the world.

**Kristie:** How did your family cope with your father's absence?

**Hannah:** The first thing was prayer, and a lot of it. It also helped us greatly to talk to close friends.

**Kristie:** While he was gone, how did you all communicate?

**Hannah:** The main way

was through letters. We were constantly writing back and forth. We would also get a phone call every three weeks from Daddy.

**Kristie:** If your father was still overseas and you got to tell him one thing in a letter, what would it be?

**Hannah:** Simply, I love you.

**Kristie:** What would you tell other families who are struggling now because their loved ones are overseas?

**Hannah:** I would tell them to keep faith, pray and hang in there.



SUBMITTED PHOTO

## MILESTONE

In 2005, Lauderdale County Emergency Medical Service District, also called Metro Ambulance Service, celebrates its 25th anniversary in business.

Business profile ...

# Metro Ambulance Service

*We asked Meridian business owners to fill out questionnaires about themselves and their work. Some questions were serious, some were just for fun.*

**Marl C. Cobler III** is the director of Lauderdale County Emergency Medical Service District — also called Metro Ambulance Service. He is also a paramedic.

*He and his wife, Lou, have one child, 11-year-old Kelly. They live in the Suqualena community and attend 15th Avenue Baptist Church.*

**By Marl C. Cobler III**  
special to The Star

## My business

- We provide the finest pre-hospital emergency medical care to the citizens and visitors of Lauderdale County, the city of Meridian and town of Marion.

- How it started? On April 1, 1980, Metro was opened by the city and county. This year we celebrate our 25th anniversary. We're proud to have served Lauderdale County.

- No. of employees: 50 full-time, 100 part-time



Cobler

## What I think

- What I look for in an employee is honesty. The employees who have been with me the longest are Johnny Williamson and T.J. Irby. Johnny is operations manager and T.J. is office manager. They have worked for the company since 1984.

- The best thing that happened at my business this year was the birth of employees' children.

- The biggest challenge my business faces in the coming year is Medicare reimbursements.

## A letter from home

- Has Sept. 11 and the U.S. War on Terror changed this country? Very much so. It's made the homeland more aware of safety.

- Has it touched my family's life? Not just my family, but the Metro family as well. I've noticed more sense of pride in our country.

- Has it affected my business? Yes, there's extra training, more equipment, more security, more suspicion and did I mention extra training?

- My message for the troops: Thank you!

## Dear soldier ...

*This letter was submitted by Andy Waite, 12, a seventh-grader at Magnolia Middle School.*

Thank you for fighting for my freedom. I really appreciate what you are doing for the United States. Sometimes I wake up, wondering if the war will end today, but it hasn't yet. One last thing — I hope you are safe and God bless.

Andy Waite



## I CAN'T IMAGINE

- ▶ A day without prayer.
- ▶ A week without prayer.
- ▶ A year without prayer.